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BULGARIAN

POLITICAL SITUATION, JULY, AUGUST 1952

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Vulko Chervenkov, the President of the Council of Ministers, made an important speech to the Communist Party Central Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party in Stalin (Varna) on 23 June 1952.

The following is an analytical resume of this speech.

announcing a purge in the lower echelons of the party, the speech left doubt as to what measures would be taken against the responsible leaders. It was decided to maintain silence until Moscow reached a decision. While implicitly

The publication of the speech of 23 June 1952 /on 10 August 1952 in Rabotnichesko Delo/ and the official announcement of Chervenkov's return now proves that the Kremlin has, for the present, given up the idea of a mass purge, which would concern the top people in the regime. The reason now appears simple: the state of disorganization of the party, principally on the level of local districts and committees, is such that it would be dangerous to throw the blame on higher officials. The present disorder would have threatened to become anarchy in this case since the Marxist-Stalinist reorientation has not yet been achieved in Rumania.

Chervenkov's speech of 23 June 1952 is a severe self-criticism and an authentic condemnation of his own activities.

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The President of the Council of Ministers said in the first place that his instructions, those of the Politburo, of the Central Committee, and of the Council of Ministers, have not been followed by the provincial organs of the state. To remedy this deficiency of letting things go their way, Chervenkov recommends that the "Bolshevik style of labor" be adopted at all levels.

This "Bolshevik style of labor," if one wishes to borrow the Marxist doctrine, has a precise meaning. It is fitting to put an end to patronage, to the "untouchable" character of men in authority, however high their rank may be. Present merits surpass past achievements. There must be a place for the young people. The old guard of the Politburo must prove itself worthy in order to maintain itself. The regime is not rigid nor must its people hold appointments for life.

These words constitute a solemn warning for Chervenkov, who is of the old guard, and for his companions who have been struggling since 1944.

But the public confession of Chervenkov does not stop there. It continues throughout the speech. To struggle against the tendency of reciprocally pardoning of faults and to eliminate the absence of control in executing assigned tasks, it is fitting to introduce into the wheels of government the "Bolshevik style," that is, personal responsibility, criticism, and self-criticism for the benefit of future generations. This new impetus will permit the party to handle better the organization of the masses which constitute the Fatherland Front, Otechestven Front and to recruit new, fervent workers, and even to win to the cause those without a party.

Thus the speech of 23 June 1952 throws a new light on the difficulties which now confront the Communist Party and its leaders. One can guess the discontentment of the Kremlin as it faces a serious economic and political situation in a satellite State which is the prime target of the USSR in Europe and which is on the shores of the Mediterranean.

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Does the moderation which Moscow has shown to this Bulgarian weakness indicate weakness on the part of the USSR? To say this would, without doubt, be going too far. It is certain, however, that the introduction of the "Bolshevik style" into Bulgaria will not go without a tightening of Soviet control and that the personal authority of Chervenkov will diminish.

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Since the Spring of 1952, the Bulgarian government has been insecure. The financial situation, which had been very serious up to the time of the monetary reform of 12 May 1952, has only temporarily improved. To be sure, this manipulation permitted the government to put an end provisionally to the inflation, to render the treasury somewhat more elastic, and to reduce the level of salaries. However, the operation, while an excellent short-term measure, has turned out to be catastrophic as a continuing policy. The purchasing power of the masses has so dwindled that heavy industry no longer finds an outlet in the country and the treasury must finance stocks of goods which accumulate. In short, on 12 May 1952 the Bulgarian government killed the hen that laid the golden eggs and no longer has any reserves. Up to the present, the various ministers have used up all the funds that were at their disposal for this year.

The financial failure received a bad report in the press. It made the regime unpopular with the masses; it demoralized lesser figures in the party; and it permitted corruption and neglect to flourish again in all state enterprises.

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To correct this situation, the Bulgarian government (more exactly, the Kremlin) considered two remedies: a lull and a purge.

The policy of the lull is not new. It goes back to the beginning of the summer of 1951 after the peasant revolts at the beginning of 1951. It was not sanctioned officially until May 1952 during the Third Congress of the Fatherland Front. After several weeks, it began to be a fact.

The lull was marked, in the secret internal policy of the Central Committee, by more or less sincere bargainings with certain members of former government parties of the first cabinets of the People's Republic of Bulgaria. These Balkan bargainings are accompanied by threats, by menacing rumors, and by investigations entrusted to the militia to spread the idea that the Bulgarian government was about to reopen old dossiers and initiate new trials against old-guard agrarians, strict socialists, and the Zveno Party. However, nothing leaks out about this whole production which still deceives the good people. It would not seem right for the "pure" people who have survived successive purges to take their places beside repentant bourgeois and "poorly converted" people. To a certain extent, the aim of the government has been achieved. An atmosphere of relaxation has thus been created which opens the way to a policy (this time more sincere) of national reorganization which will be animated by the Fatherland Front.

Vulko Chervenkov's report at the Third Congress of the Fatherland Front at the end of May 1952 impressed all its readers with its vagueness. The press of recent weeks and the National Council of the Fatherland Front have just jointly established the meaning and scope of it. It is a question of nothing less than putting the policy of the lull into operation.

The press reveals that kulaks are no longer the enemies of the people and writes: "Cooperative peasants and free peasants must maintain friendly relations; party organizations must work along this line."

The highest party authorities are now interpreting Chervenkov's declarations of May 1952 as follows:

The Fatherland Front, which has only a small number of Communist Party card holders, must become a mass organization designed to include the whole of the Bulgarian people in order to constitute a patriotic front, a bulwark of popular power, and the primary associate of the people's soviets of workers' deputies in all echelons. To achieve this end, primary organizations must intensify their political activity and education of the people.

These declarations, which show the discreet "setting up of cells" (noyautage) by the party were immediately followed by results.

According to a decision by its National Council, the Fatherland Front will organize during the 1952-53 school year auxiliary courses in which all rural and urban population will be invited to participate (in the Communist sense of the word). These courses will start in the towns and cities 1 October 1952 and will end 30 April 1953. In the villages, they will begin 1 November 1952 and will end 31 March 1953.

Instruction will be given simultaneously to reading groups and instruction groups.

Two categories of reading groups which especially interest the villagers have been created. The first reading group, a permanent group of students, will study Bulgarian and Soviet literature. The works will show the past of the Bulgarian people, the battle against fascism and imperialist bondage, the national wars, the progress in building socialism in Bulgaria and the USSR, the struggle of the workers for liberty in capitalist countries, and the struggle for a lasting peace and for democracy.

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The second category of reading group, is a less permanent one and listeners will limit their program to a study of works which show the success of building socialism, especially of cooperative farms.

In the areas bordering Yugoslavia, Turkey, and Greece, the groups of both categories will emphasize in their studies the life of Bulgarian and Soviet frontier guards, as well as the "miserable" situation of workers in these neighboring countries.

In the areas where there is a Turkish minority, groups will work on the study of the Bulgarian constitution, building socialism in Bulgaria and the USSR, the struggle for peace, and the "misery" of workers in Turkey.

Instruction groups are designed for persons who have a certain general education and for persons directing the work of reading groups. Their instruction is specialized. There are instruction groups for studying the administrative and political organization of Bulgaria; groups for studying the organization of Bulgarian agriculture (in the villages); groups for studying the USSR and Communism; groups for studying the biography of Stalin (in the cities and towns); and groups for studying the biography of Georgi Dimitrov (in the cities and towns).

Propagandists of the Central Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party will participate with people's soviets in organizing reading and instruction groups. These courses will be held every day or every other day. Printed programs of the courses will be delivered at the proper time to the propagandists.

To accomplish a political action of such magnitude (in 1951 - 1952, Fatherland Front courses were attended by 450,000 students; for the 1952-53 school year the party hopes to go beyond 1,500,000), the party must have more than 50,000 faithful adherents to occupy all the leading positions in the Fatherland Front organization, the University, and in the Dimitrov Union of People's Youth. This is not the case.

The financial measure of 12 May 1952 has hurt all vocations and the threat of a purge, which would be necessary if order were to be returned to the organizations of the state, caused those who still are full-fledged Communists to retreat. The posts which the party occupies in the mass organizations are among the most dangerous and the least rewarding. The only people who occupy such positions are young people in search of employment and opportunists without conviction.

This situation, which is well known to the Kremlin and the Bulgarian government, as well as to the general public, has given rise to the opinion that a mass purge, which may include the top men of the party, is imminent.

In fact, the teaching profession, the army, some people's soviets, and lower-echelon people from the Fatherland Front, were purged during recent weeks.

However, the affair stopped there. The President of the Council of Ministers was reprimanded by the Soviet Politburo and had to give an explanation to the judges of the Kremlin. After the investigation, they thought that without doubt it was inopportune to create a crisis publicly and immediately at a time when the Rumanian affair was still not settled. The Bulgarian purge, if it included the highest people, would succeed in terrorizing the remaining Communists, raise again the question of replacing Chervanov, and check the policy of a lull that Moscow was trying to promote for the sake of recent events on the Greek-Bulgarian frontier.

The Greek action against the Island of Gamma is explained as follows in the best Communist circles here: "The attack by Athens has shown that Bulgarian public opinion, very unfavorably disposed a priori to its government's attitude toward

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everything concerning Yugoslavia and Turkey, was much more disposed to agree with it as regards Greece. The Chervenkov cabinet was thus able to see that Bulgarian public opinion could still operate to its advantage in the presence of the Greek "hereditary enemy." The Kremlin saw in this a comforting element, which will, without doubt, cause it to maintain its policy of a lull, at a moment when foreign events serve its designs so well. It will introduce a mass purge later which will transcend its general policy.

Served by events and personal prestige, however weak it may be, Chervenkov seems to have won a difficult battle for the second time in 2 years. However, he will continue to live from day to day, like the country he rules, under increasing control from Moscow.

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For some time it has been possible to observe in Bulgaria a perceptible softening of Communist methods of oppression. It is not that the people have been emancipated or that the regime has conceded to them certain fundamental civic rights, for it is certainly far from the idea of these rulers to introduce democratic principles into Bulgaria.

There are no longer the mass deportations of 2 years ago. The last indication of such deportation was in November 1950 when thousands of families in Sofia and other principal cities were ordered to leave their homes and settle in some small locality in the provinces. The order was rescinded at the last minute.

Up to the present, there seems to be no explanation for this change of orders. These families are still occupying their houses and the order for their expulsion has not been renewed, as was expected.

If there are still deportations going on, they are isolated cases.

Since the arrests throughout Bulgaria in April 1951, when thousands of people were arrested (some were tried in court and the others were sent to concentration camps), there have been no mass internments in prisons or in forced labor camps. The number of persons interned at the Belesme concentration camp has diminished.

This state of affairs has calmed the spirits of the people, who formerly waited to leave their houses at a moment's notice to be sent to a concentration camp.

However, a certain amount of unrest is tormenting the people, because of the decree on personal passports of 1 April 1952. The passports have not been introduced up to this date, but it is thought that once they are introduced, new internments would ensue.

There is a softening of measures against the peasants. They are no longer subject to arbitrary acts as flagrantly as in the past. The violent attacks against the kulaks have diminished, if not disappeared from the columns of the newspapers.

A similar change has occurred regarding the Fatherland Front organization and its thousands of subdivisions throughout the country, which organized obligatory political meetings several times a week, in which all the inhabitants of the country had to participate under penalty of reprisals. Today these meetings are on a monthly basis and are of relatively short duration. This constitutes a considerable softening, which can only be appreciated by those who previously did not have a single free minute and who can now dispose of their own time after work.

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This halt cannot be attributed to a desire on the part of the leaders to comfort an oppressed people or to introduce a partial democratization of the regime, for the Communists certainly do not think that they have won over the majority of Bulgarians to their cause and therefore need no longer employ terror as an instrument of their dictatorship.

It cannot be said that the deportations and internments ceased because elements considered dangerous by the regime have been wiped out, for the thousands of families to be expelled in 1950 are certainly far from being converted to Communism.

Others attribute the softening to Vulko Chervenkov, President of the Council of Ministers, who they imagine as generous and charitable. This is very unlikely, because Chervenkov is not governing the country and hence cannot introduce personal elements into the administration of Bulgaria, which has become a Soviet province.

Perhaps it is a question of taking two steps forward and one step backward to give the people a moment's rest as well as a false impression about Communist tactics. In this case, the "one step backward" has already lasted a long time and the "two steps forward" will not be long in coming to crush anew this unfortunate people.

The present halt is only an arbitrary action by the administration, as the people do not forget the other severe measures inflicted upon them, like the monetary reform of 10 May 1952, which deprived the people of their small savings and which, by the rise in prices which accompanied it, lowered their standard of living still further.

However difficult the monetary measures may be, they are less painful than arrests or internments.

It is possible that the Communists are experimenting with a new system of lessening the political terror in order to exert more pressure on the economy with the intention of achieving total submission by reducing the people to misery and by rendering them completely dependent on their salaries. In this sense the Communists have succeeded, for today each person is concerned for his job because it is his only guarantee of bread to feed his family.

Perhaps the day is not far off when this passive state will disappear as quickly as it came without anyone knowing how or why.

[REDACTED] the Roman Catholic Church in Bulgaria had been made the subject of new persecutions and that a number of priests had been arrested.

The search which took place 7 July 1952 at the Catholic church in Sofia was followed by a second and even more thorough search on the morning of 8 July 1952, when the agents worked throughout the day there.

In Plovdiv, the number of priests arrested rose to seven and in Ruse to two, including the secretary of the Bishop of Nikopolis [Nikopol?], Monsignor Bosilkov.

[REDACTED] the authorities wanted at all costs to find ties between Catholic priests in Bulgaria and the Vatican, as the priests had been ordered to break off all relations with Rome.

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Local authorities were persuaded that these relations continued despite the order and that the Vatican would manage through some diplomatic channels to send funds for the support of the Roman Catholic Church in Bulgaria. This is quite probable because the Bulgarian Catholic Church has no other source of income and no longer receives subsidies from the Bulgarian government.

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[REDACTED] a large number of Greek families are said to have been settled by the local authorities in the village of Pavel Babin, [near] a steam heat and power station situated on the northern slope of Sredna Gora about 40 kilometers east of Kazanluk.

Although they had been well treated by the Bulgarians, these Greek families are said to have protested because they were being kept in Bulgaria, and to have demanded their repatriation. This request was refused and led to their transfer to a locality far from Sofia.

People of a certain age were brought into Bulgaria by the Communists when they retreated from Greece and are now located at Bankya, a resort near Sofia.

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